

ENTERTAINMENT

# Earthy soul from a vast catalog

By **MICHAEL HEATON**

MUSIC CRITIC

For better and worse, it was a lot like old times Sunday night. Laura Nyro made her first Cleveland appearance in well over a decade at Peabody's DownUnder. The earth mother-poetess and soul singer gave an impassioned one-hour performance of old and new material that left many in the audience wanting to hear more songs from her extensive catalog.

She and her five-piece band opened with "Wind" from her Gamble and Huff produced "Gonna Take a Miracle" LP. Singing and playing keyboards most of the evening, Nyro has all of her expansive vocal tone intact. She's still writing the kind of emotional white-soul-

## MUSIC LAURA NYRO

jazz-folk that's been pulling heart-strings for years.

Out of the public eye for about four years since the release of her last "Mother Spiritual" album, Nyro is in the middle of recording a new record for Columbia, some of which she played at Peabody's. Where much of her early material, from "New York Tenderberry," "Christmas and Beads of Sweat" and "Ely and 13th Confession" was about longing for and losing love, the older, wiser and mother of one now writes about family life with the same smoldering sensuality and spiritual understanding.

The 20-song set included two

encores and hits such as "Wedding Bell Blues," "When I Die," "Stone Soul Picnic" and "Up on the Roof." Her ensemble seemed to watch and wait on her every musical move giving the arrangements the exacting, delicate feel that is her trademark. She talked very little to the audience, occasionally introducing songs in her whisper. Then she'd pour her heart and soul into numbers like "Ocean," "Companion" and "High-Heeled Sneakers."

Diane Wilson accompanied her on back-up vocals, and Nyro's longtime friend, Nydia Mata, was there on congas and bongos. The endings to a lot of Nyro's new material seemed abrupt and incompletely arranged, but perhaps that has more to do with the new album being "in-the-works" than any

artistic indecision. She did a song about animal rights called "Wild World," her title track from the documentary "Broken Rainbow," and did a clever and amusing short story sort of song entitled "Dancers, Sweepers, Bookkeepers."

During Nyro's last Cleveland appearance, (which was a sold-out engagement at the John Carroll gym), Nyro apologized to the crowd for her shorter than usual performance, blaming her vocal difficulties on too many cigarettes. There were no excuses Sunday night, and some in the audience were hoping for more than an hour's worth of Nyro's work.

Backstage after the show Nyro was interested in getting some dinner. "I've worked very hard tonight," she said. "And now I'm going to eat some pizza."



**LAURA NYRO:** Her expansive vocal tone is intact.